DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 441 287 EA 030 415

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TITLE Defining Professionalism for the Educational Administrator: Perspectives of Aspiring Leaders.
PUB DATE 2000-00-00
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cooperative Learning; *Educational Administration; Elementary Secondary Education; Emotional Response; Higher Education; Leadership; *Security (Psychology); Self Concept; *Stress Management; *Time Management
IDENTIFIERS *Professionalism

ABSTRACT

This paper reports the work of a spring 1999 class of beginning-level students in educational administration who were challenged by their professor either to define the term "professionalism" for the field or to cease using the term. In accepting the challenge to find meaning in the term, the students researched the literature, talked with other aspiring leaders, and interviewed practitioners. Working in cooperative-learning groups of four or five members, they determined four areas of study for their work: (1) factors impacting the field currently and in the future; (2) attitudes and behavior; (3) skills, abilities, and knowledge; and (4) personal management, for example, dealing with stress, managing time, and finding balance between personal and professional lives. This paper reports findings in the four areas and suggests what specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes professional educational administrators need to succeed in practice, such as a high degree of self-knowledge, the ability to lead by example and model behavior they wish others to demonstrate, the ability to see themselves as vision-builders, and the ability to strive to nurture a healthy emotional intelligence. (Contains 27 references.) (DFR)

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ED 441 287

Defining Professionalism for the Educational Administrator: Perspectives of Aspiring Leaders

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This paper reports the work of a Spring, 1999, class of beginning-level students in educational administration who were challenged by their professor either to define the term "professionalism" for the field or to cease using the term. Students decided to accept the challenge and to find meaning, they researched the literature, talked with other aspiring leaders, and interviewed practitioners. Working in cooperative learning groups of four or five members, they determined four areas of study for their work: factors impacting the field currently and in the future; attitudes and behaviors; skills, abilities, and knowledge; and personal management, e.g., dealing with stress, managing time, and finding balance between personal and professional lives. This paper reports their findings in the four areas and suggests what specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes professional educational administrators need to succeed in practice as they "march into a new millennium."

Factors Influencing the Field of Educational Administration

Review of the current literature and interviews with practicing administrators suggested to students that the following factors impact the knowledge base, skills, and behaviors needed by school leaders now and in the immediate future: (1) increased need for school safety; (2) knowledge about and skill with technology; (3) increased requirement for personal and professional growth; (4) social and community trends; (5) population and growth changes.

Students noted that from July 1992 to December 1998, "there have been 13 school shootings involving multiple victims in the United States, in which 31 children have died." [1] Since then, the debacle at Columbine High School and elsewhere have added to the number of violent deaths in schools. Interviews with practicing principals suggested to the aspiring administrators that increasing amounts of a principal's time are given to developing crisis plans,

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dealing with students who exhibit violence towards others, and working with local police to curb the number of weapons brought to school. Principals decried an increasing lack of civility among students of all ages and decreasing respect for school and school personnel demonstrated by students, parents and community members.

In response to principals' concerns and evidence from the literature about school safety and violence prevention, students (the aspiring leaders) concluded that school leaders need to know how to help students learn greater respect for themselves and others, how to manage feelings and emotions positively, how to work with parents whose attitudes towards schools may be less than positive, how to work cooperatively with external agencies such as the local police and social service agencies, and how to help school personnel work with these issues. It was seen as critical that various community and social agencies begin to work more closely together sharing knowledge and resources to meet the needs of children and their families.

Student interviews with principals showed that principals need to learn to use technology as a tool for management of the "business" of school and as a tool for learning for the students, the faculty, and the administrators. As the nation moves from the industrial age to the information age with a global perspective, the skills with which administrators can manage the information technology will impact the success of the individual and those he leads.

An increased need for continued professional development on the part of school leaders became obvious to students as they interviewed practitioners and reviewed the literature. According to Joseph Murphy, Chair of the Department of Educational Leadership at Peabody College of Vanderbilt University, "Tomorrow's principal will need to learn—and help others to learn." In our rapidly changing world, principals will need to model continuous learning for students and teachers and provide them with a supportive climate in which to learn.

Ongoing study of social and economic trends, of dealing with greater diversity, and learning about new ways of teaching and learning are topics on which practitioners must remain

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[1] Williams, Wendy M. Preventing Violence in School: What Can Principals Do?

current. Aspiring leaders stated that they also will need to update continuously their organizational and management skills.

Students reported that social and community trends impact the practice of educational leadership as do population and growth changes. They noted that family composition continues to change, that more children live in poverty, that racial and ethnic diversity will continue to increase, as will the proportion of students whose first language is not English.[2] These trends require new understandings from administrators who must learn to communicate clearly with people who may have different languages, cultures, and values. Aspiring leaders must become culturally competent in a variety of cultures new to them. School leaders must be proficient in relating to the entire school community and its needs.

The population and growth changes school administrators must deal with in addition to those mentioned above are many. Students recognized that most schools in the United States still operate on the agrarian calendar despite the fact that few students come from farm families. This shift in population suggested to aspiring leaders that changes in school calendars and structures would benefit students and families. The nature of school populations is changing as schools become increasingly integrated and inclusive. Learning how to work effectively with all students and their families, and providing the best education possible for all students is a challenge to educational leaders who must be knowledgeable about increasingly diverse delivery systems.

Attitudes and Behaviors

Students determined that administrators must have a high degree of self-knowledge, i.e., know what one believes and act upon those beliefs. Honesty and integrity must be demonstrated as must candor and maturity. The aspiring leaders believed that administrators need to follow

[2] Lumsen, Linda. Trends and Issues: Social and Economic Context

through on promises made whether the promise be supplying sufficient red paper for holiday bulletin boards, defending teachers from unreasonable parents, or providing activities designed to build a vision for the school.

The aspiring leaders believed that administrators must lead by example and model behavior they wish others to demonstrate. Administrators must listen well and display empathy and understanding. They must work to build trust and understand that trust provides a competitive advantage. Educational leaders must be comfortable with change, view meaningful change as good, and value their role as change agent. Leaders must also be comfortable with complexity, diversity, shared governance, and not always knowing the answer. Leaders should have a "bias toward action."

Skills, Abilities, Knowledge

Administrators of the new millennium must see themselves as vision-builders and as facilitators of teachers' learning. Knowing how to effectively mentor new teachers, inspire veterans, and deal appropriately with marginal and unacceptable teachers are necessary skills. Leaders must understand participatory management and shared decision making. They must empower others by modeling appropriate and desired behaviors and attitudes. Administrators must understand the structure of organizations, organizational culture, and the nature of change in both individuals and organizations. They must understand that self-interest can be integrated with organizational interest.

Education leaders must excel in building a learning community within the school that reaches out to parents, community members, social service agencies, businesses, and universities. The leaders must be skilled communicators and consensus-builders. School

administrators must act as a "moral voice by raising questions about purpose, institutionalizing shared values, and motivating others by personal example."[3]

Personal Management

According to Irene J. Hoover, a practicing elementary school principal, school administrators must "strive to nurture a healthy emotional intelligence."[4] The aspiring leaders concluded that school administrators must be physically and emotionally healthy themselves in order to provide others with a healthy working environment. Based on their interviews with practicing administrators, they saw as necessities time for reflection and study, good lifelong health habits of exercise, nutrition, and rest and recreation. Also, based on the interviews, the aspiring leaders concluded that having a highly competent support staff, especially a knowledgeable and efficient secretary, contributes to effective management and good mental health of the leader. Using a daily planner, recognizing one's peak work time, and being available to staff were seen as critical. Practitioners recommended the development of a network of colleagues for support, encouragement, and, occasionally, fun. The importance of support from family and friends and spending time with family and friends was stressed by practitioners.

Summary and Conclusions

This paper reported the work of a class of beginning-level students in educational administration who wanted to define "professionalism" for the field. Students read the literature

[3] Lashway, Larry. Trends and Issues: Role of the School Leader.
[4] Hoover, Irene J. Leadership in the 21st Century.

and interviewed practitioners and other aspiring leaders. They identified factors impacting the field; learned what attitudes and behaviors are required for school leaders; discovered what knowledge, skills, and abilities contribute to successful practice; and determined what personal management skills are desired. Students concluded that school leadership is an impossible job effectively described by Michael Fullan (citing R. Evans) in the following want ad:

> Wanted: A miracle worker who can do more with less, pacify rival groups, endure chronic second guessing, tolerate low levels of support, process large volumes of paper and work double shifts (75 nights a year out). He or she will have carte blanche to innovate, but cannot spend much money, replace any personnel, or upset any constituency.[5]

Students also concluded that being a "professional" school leader is an exciting experience, a job that contributes to society in positive ways because it focuses on the future, our children. These aspiring leaders commented that the challenge to define "professionalism" led them to greater knowledge about and appreciation for the role of school leader, a role they hope soon to fill where they will "Focus on the mission and articulate the vision."

[1] Fullan, Michael. Leadership for the 21st Century.

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